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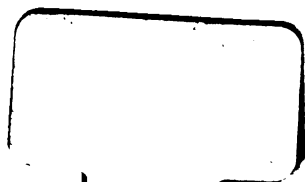


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REALIZED IDEAL

by

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MAGRUDER



(Magruder)
NBC

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BY

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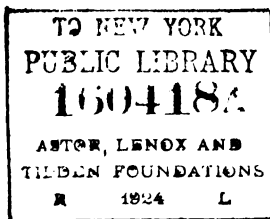
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A Realized Ideal

I

"Really, Philip—"

The speaker, who had uttered these two words with energy, suddenly broke off. It was Gertrude Hill, and she was speaking to her husband's cousin, Philip Drury, who lay in a hammock and smoked while she sat upright and mended stockings. These were of various sizes, to cover the feet of both big and little children. Mrs. Hill truly adored her children, but it was sometimes thought that she was somewhat ostentatiously domestic. There were others to mend stockings for her, but she liked the feeling it gave.

"Well?" said Drury, and waited.

"What's the use!" exclaimed his com

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panion. "I was about to begin, for the thousandth time, to remonstrate with you, when I remembered what a waste of breath it was. I wish I could make up my mind to give you up and let you alone."

"Please don't! You are almost the only one who has n't, and I look to you to save me yet. Do go on with what you were going to say. 'Really, Philip'—what?"

"You know already what it is I have always on my mind to say to you, but I've said it so often, and you've given me so little satisfaction, that I wonder at my own persistency."

"So do I, and I love you for it, too! You're a dear. Try me once more and see if I do n't do better. I'm in a mood of grim honesty to-day, and if you want to get to the bottom of things and of me, now is your chance. This morning's post brought me a letter which has set me to thinking. George Churchill is going to be married!"

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"Well!" exclaimed his companion, with an intonation in which satisfaction triumphed over wonder.

"Of course you're delighted. I knew you would be. Marrying is the straight road to your favor always. It's a different thing with me, though. George Churchill, though much younger than I am, is about the most companionable fellow that I know. We were to have gone to Africa together. There is nothing left for me now but to go back alone."

"Philip Drury!" exclaimed his companion, sitting upright in her wicker chair, and gesticulating with a hand tightly cased in a black stocking. "Go back to Africa, indeed! A man has no right to fly straight into the face of Providence like that! What George Churchill is doing is the one right and proper thing for a man to do. Instead of taking him for an example, as you should, you propose to fly right off to that heathenish and outrageous existence from which a kind Providence

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has delivered you once. What do you want to go to Africa for?"

"Big game."

"Big fiddlesticks! Much you care for the big game when you get it. Come, now, you promised to be honest."

"So I did. Thank you for reminding me. I ought to confess, then, that I have had hopes of doing some real service as an explorer. And besides, one is able to throw off trouble there as one cannot do here."

"Trouble, indeed! You do irritate me. What trouble is there in the life of a man, young, healthy, popular, rich, and with everything on earth to make him happy, except a wife to preside over his beautiful home—and that to be had for the asking?"

"But suppose one sees no woman whom one is inclined to ask?"

"Nonsense!"

"Not nonsense at all, my dear Gerty, as far as I am concerned—experience!"

"Do you mean to tell me you have never been in love?"

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“Well, not exactly that, since we have agreed that we are in the Palace of Truth; but I mean to tell you very emphatically that I never saw a woman whom I wished to marry.”

“And why?”

He hesitated a moment, and then said, seriously :

“As often as I have had that question put by my friends and well-wishers—Why I do not seek a wife?—I have never given the real answer. I wonder whether you will believe me if I give it to you now! I have promised to be honest, and I will. The reason is simply this: I have carried about with me, ever since I came to man’s estate, and even before, a certain ideal—distinct and definite, but so far unrealized. Where I got it, when I got it, how I got it, I do not know. I cannot remember the time when I had not the consciousness of that supreme woman in my soul, but she reigns there with the sway of an autocrat, and has never given any sign of

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an intention to abdicate. I go about the world, and beauties and charmers by the score are introduced to me, with their visible, tangible, actual attractions; but, as I look at their loveliness, listen to their sweet voices, bask in their smiles, my lady in her citadel serenely reigns; and though I have never seen, heard, or touched her, I am her slave, and her hold upon my spirit never leaves me for an instant free."

He had been swinging himself gently back and forth, smoking idly and looking off into space. As he ceased speaking he encountered his companion's gaze, and it brought him back to reality with a start.

"What on earth do you mean by that rigmarole?" she said. "I do not pretend to understand. Do you actually expect me to believe that an imaginary woman is in possession of you, and is keeping you from marrying a real one?"

"Just that, I assure you," said Drury, simply.

"Why, it's a sort of craziness! Do

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you imagine that you see her and know what she is like?"

"I do see her in a way, but not distinctly, and although I don't know specifically what she is like, I know infallibly what she is not like. She bears no resemblance to any woman I have seen. She is fair"—again his gaze wandered into space—"and she is not tall, quite small, in fact, and exquisitely perfect as to figure, hands, arms, feet, shoulders, throat! I can almost see all those, but the face is veiled. I can see the color of her hair—a delicate pale brown that I have never seen except in the hair of young children. I have caught a glimpse of it there occasionally, which has made my heart beat. The color of her eyes I do not know, but their expression I do, and I should recognize her instantly by that. I should also know her voice, though I have no suspicion what language she would speak. Although I only know her in imagination, I am absolutely certain that she exists upon this earth in

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actual flesh and blood, and that my eyes shall one day rest upon her."

He was growing meditative and introspective again, when his companion said, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Well, Philip Drury, I always knew that you were queer, but *how* queer it has been left for this day and hour to reveal! I've done with you after this. You'll have to go your own way, if it carries you to Africa."

"And away from the Altar of Hymen, etc.? Well, Gerty dear, it's just as well that you should know the truth about me. I have told it to you in sacred confidence, remember, for no one else must have the right which I have given you to consider me a lunatic. You take a very kind and cousinly interest in me, and I am glad that you should know the most important thing about me."

His companion looked at him intently for a moment. Then she said, "Are you telling me the truth?"

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"I give you my honor," he said, with extreme gravity. "Few indeed are the occasions of my life on which I have told to any one a truth so supremely important to myself."

"And what, then, is to become of the Drury diamonds, the pictures, the silver, the thousand lovely things which you have inherited, to pass on to those who are to come after you?"

"I have seen those diamonds, in many a fond vision of fancy, adorning the lovely throat and hands and arms and breast of my sweet dream-lady. If she never wears them, they remain in bank where they are until I am gone, and my heir—whichever of my cousins I may choose,—shall see fit to bestow them along with all the rest."

"Do you believe yourself to be quite sane in mind?"

"I do, while I remain true to this ideal. If I should be false to it—if, after the beatific vision I have had revealed to my spiritual sight, I should make a compro-

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mise with my ideal self and descend to lower things, I should feel inclined to doubt my sanity then."

"To be as frank with you as you have been with me, I doubt it now," said his companion; "but there's no use in discussing it further. Tell me about George Churchill. Who is the girl, and when is the marriage to be, and where?"

"She is an American whom he met abroad. She was traveling with some relatives. Her parents are dead. Her name is Sybil Cloude. The marriage is to take place almost immediately, in England, and I am calmly asked to cross the ocean to be best man."

"Foolishness! You had much better stay at home, look up that old law diploma, open your office in New York, and settle down to work—and marriage!"

"Not yet awhile, Gerty. It may come ultimately, for my ideal lady may materialize and may not scorn me. I must go to George's wedding. It would n't do to dis-

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appoint him. I'm not fond of weddings. Nothing short of doing this service to George would take me to one now. To tell the whole truth—since I've made you my confessor—I have a certain preconceived ideal of a face behind a bride's veil, and I feel disinclined to see any other there. No doubt this seems to you a perfectly insane idea."

"It does, indeed," his companion answered, "quite on a par with the rest! I'm grateful for your confidence, Philip, but I must say I am disappointed in you."

"Poor Gerty! It's too bad," said Drury, and he looked candidly into her face and shook his head, as if in regretful but final denial of her hopes.

II

In due course of time Drury crossed the ocean to render the last sad rites to his bachelor friend. He made no protest, of course, but it seemed a pity to him that such a charming, dashing, young fellow as George Churchill should be lost to the world by early marriage.

Drury's talk with Gertrude Hill had been, in a sense, a self-revelation to him. He had never so well understood the definite barrier that stood between him and matrimony as since he had put his case in articulate words.

All the way over on the steamer he watched with critical observation the charming young women of various nations who were his traveling companions, and compared them to the lady of his vision,

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to their great and final detriment. The very fact of his friend's marriage seemed to make him the more adverse to matrimony, and every hour he felt more inclined to brave the opposition of his friends and return to Africa. He had been there once, and besides much adventure he had done some service as an explorer, and he felt fully repaid for the dangers through which he had passed, as well as for a tedious attack of fever which it had taken him a year to recover from.

He had brought a very exquisite present for George's bride, a collar made of strings of pearls, interrupted at intervals by diamond clasps, of very beautiful workmanship. It seemed almost lovely enough for the ideal lady, he thought, but the Drury diamonds were reserved for her, and no one else during his lifetime should ever wear them. That fact seemed to him now more definite than ever.

Rather shrinking from the thought of a too extended view of George's bliss, Drury

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had cut himself rather short as to time, and a spell of bad weather made it doubtful for awhile whether he would be on hand for the marriage. As it turned out he barely accomplished it, arriving only an hour or so before the set time—too late to make the acquaintance of the bride-elect.

George, of course, was overjoyed to see him, and declared that since he had arrived there was nothing wanting to his complete and perfect happiness. He looked the very ideal of a joyous and confident bridegroom, and of course talked endlessly of the beauty, grace, charm, accomplishments, etc., of the bride-to-be. The necklace delighted him.

"The loveliest thing I ever saw," he said. "By Jove! she shall be married in it," and he sent it to her, with a request to this effect hastily scribbled on a card.

The excess of his vitality had a somewhat depressing effect upon Drury. He felt anxious to get through with this wed-

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ding ceremonial—to have it over. As he dressed for the wedding he reproached himself for not being in a gayer mood; but his friend, supremely content in himself and his present condition, saw nothing outside his own happiness.

The hour arrived. The two men drove together to the church, and waited in the vestry-room. In spite of some appearances to the contrary, Drury had an affectionate nature, and his heart was very tender over the unclouded joy of this young being who had chosen him out of all the world to be his friend of friends. They were strongly a contrast to one another, the bridegroom, slight, blonde, and joyous-looking as any youth from Arcady, and his friend older, larger, stronger, darker, with a skin bronzed by African exposure, and muscles toughened by the endurance of hardships and danger. The choice between them would have to depend upon the taste of the beholder.

They entered the chancel together, and

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stood in silence while the sonorous chords of Wagner's wedding-march were struck on the organ, and the air grew vibrant with its triumph.

The clergyman was in his place waiting, as they waited also, for the coming of the bride. The air was sweet with the odor of myriads of roses. The pews in front of them were filled with a hushed and absorbed crowd, whose fans fluttered, stirring sweet odors. The various colors of dresses and bonnets and ribbons were massed in a wide-reaching, particolored blur, down the middle of which the bridal procession now slowly advanced.

These figures also seemed to make a blur, men in black with white favors, girls in pink with masses of roses, all blended together without distinction, until, as they fell apart to right and left, there appeared in their midst a figure in pure vaporous white, into whose eyes for one instant Drury looked, as she took her place beside George Churchill, to be made his wife.

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And Philip Drury—for custom is strong and civilization has done its work—stood calmly by, and did his passive part, and saw the woman to whom all the currents of his being were suddenly set as in a stream of fire, give her vows to the man who was his friend, until death should them part! For this woman, standing so near him and uttering this pledge, had looked at him with the face of his ideal, and was speaking in her voice!

Was that face beautiful? Was that voice sweet? He did not know. He knew only that it was the supreme woman, the being foreordained for the highest worship of his soul, the eternal allegiance of his love! Whatever the attitude of her body, soul, and spirit might be to other men and women, he knew his attitude toward her, and without word or sign he made a spontaneous pledge of his fealty to her through life and until death. At the same instant she was plighting her faith to his friend!

He heard her say, "I, Sybil, take thee,

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George," and he realized the solemn obligation of her pledge. He knew that it bound him, too, but he also knew that beyond contravention or possibility of mistake this was the woman for whom he had waited, for whom he should now go forever lonely and unsatisfied! He had always known that he would recognize her instantly when his eyes should rest upon her. He had always wondered that men could be satisfied to have that revelation come to them by slow experience, and he felt a sense of triumph in the suddenness and decisiveness with which it had now come to him.

He was not a coxcomb, and not for one instant did he dream or hope that this recognition might be mutual. She was now become George Churchill's wife, and he could and did wish them both happiness; but none the less she was his, he felt, in a way in which she could not possibly be another's! She had been supernaturally revealed to him before he had

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ever seen or heard of her. She was his ideal lady, seen in dreams so long, and now before him in the flesh at last.

He heard the words of lifelong bondage uttered, and it was his lady's voice which gave her pledge to another. He saw George Churchill place the wedding-ring upon a hand which was the fair identical of what his dream had shown him. Her figure, small, delicate, and of an exquisite grace, was powerfully familiar to him, and her motions, when she turned her back and went off down the aisle upon her husband's arm, were just as he had seen them all these years. He had had no vision of her face, and yet it was not unfamiliar to him, in that it was the absolute fulfillment of his desire—the one face that he had ever seen in which his soul was satisfied.

George had told him that he was to kiss her when introduced, and to call her Sybil. But kiss her, on the sufferance of another man, he could not! When the ardent bridegroom drew him forward,

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on their return to the house, and said, eloquently, "Sybil, this is Philip," he took the little hand that seemed in some wonderful, spiritual way to be his own, and said, looking deep into her upturned eyes :

"Yes, Sybil, I am Philip. I have dreamed and imagined about you for a long time. I am very happy to look upon you in reality." And all the time he was thinking, "You do n't know it, but you are mine, by a right you cannot question."

It gave him a sense of delight to see the jewel he had given her clasped close around her throat, as if he held her by a sort of bond. She spoke of it and praised its beauty, thanking him. He listened and said nothing, but he thought, "Why should you thank me? It is yours, and I and all of mine are yours. The Drury diamonds are not worthy of you, but they are yours, and shall not be another's while I live!"

It was evident that the bridegroom made an effort to keep other friends at

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bay, so that the bride might give her first attention to his friend, and as she did so, looking at and speaking to him with a fervid interest, he was almost silent. He spoke only such uttered words as convention required, but he looked at her as if to absorb her being into his mind and his vision, laying in store memories from this hour which might be his companion and consolation in all the loneliness to come.

Drury knew himself by this period of his life, and he quite realized that he must not see her again. She was too divinely dear, too subtly sweet! He was at no pains to make himself agreeable to her. He felt that he cared little what she thought of him. It was all a matter of fate. Fate had led him to the lady of his dream at this strange time of her life, and fate would do the rest.

Every word she uttered, every glance of her eye, every movement of her body, was so absolutely the expression of herself, the natural fulfillment of his ideal of her, that

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there was no element of surprise, only completeness and satisfaction in it all.

And yet, had his ideal not been an humble one? He had dreamed of exquisite grace and goodness and beauty and sweetness, and here before him they were! He had dreamed of an ethereal delicacy of nature and of physique, and they were here! She fulfilled his dreams, but she went beyond them, too, for his imagination had not been equal to a conception of so gracious and lovely a presence. He saw that her nature was a graver one than her husband's, her mind deeper, her spirit broader. Her face, too, in comparison with his, was very serious, as if not even the joy of this moment could eclipse the habitual grave and tender thoughts which occupied her mind.

With George, however, there was nothing but the present. He had given up his whole being to it, as plainly as she had reserved a part of hers.

But about one thing there could be no

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mistake, and that was her love for her charming young husband. Drury saw that this was so. He knew it to be the only means of happiness to either of them, and he was glad.

When it was necessary for him to give way to others who came to pay their tribute to the bride, he managed still to linger near and watch her.

How strange he felt! This was the being for whom he had waited all his life with perfect faith that she would come—and it was so that she had come at last! Every word she spoke to kinsfolk, acquaintance or friend, every kiss, and smile, and handshake, seemed to be of her own essence, and explicitly what he would have expected and desired.

As he stood apart and looked at her, he saw that she was very lovely, not faultlessly beautiful, but something far more. Her hair—that delicate pale brown hair which he had had a vision of!—was drawn backward from her face, round which it

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grew in five definite and charming little points. Her eyes, a clear, soft brown, were beautiful in themselves, and were set in her head in a peculiar and exquisite way which gave her an expression like that in early pictures of the saints and madonnas. Her features, whether classic or not, were in divine conformity to his dreams of beauty, and her smile, he knew in his heart, could never again be equaled for sweetness and for charm.

An overwhelming sense of loneliness oppressed him. He felt that life's chief treasure and reward were not for him, and that he must get away to himself, and look the future in the face, and see what he could make of his changed life.

A little later he was called to go off with the bridegroom to make ready for the wedding journey.

It was well and right that the new-made husband should be happy, but the quality of his joy grated on Drury.

"How old are you, George?—I forget,"

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he said, suddenly, as the bridegroom stood equipped before him.

"Twenty-four, and Sybil is just the same—less than a month younger than I am. She says she used to think that she would like to marry an older man, but that now she wishes that she had been precisely one month older herself. The fact is, she's ages older than I am in mind and in real knowledge, and she'll do me a lot of good, I know. I'll do the same for her, however. She's very nearly perfect, but she's a little too grave, and given to taking things and people seriously. I'll have to get her out of all that."

These words, so lightly spoken, had an effect on Drury which would have filled the speaker with surprise, could he have known it. He was positively outraged that George Churchill, this whipper-snapper, should presume to criticise the lady most lovely; and that he should assume the position toward her of mentor and reformer, and propose to change her in con-

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formity to his ignorant ideals, seemed to be a thing to make the stones cry out.

The stones, however, held their peace, and so did he! He would have liked to throw this presumptuous lad out of the window, but civilization prevailed again. George Churchill was all very well, considered as a charming boy whom he, as an older man, made a sort of favorite and companion of; but viewed as the self asserting husband of this nymph, this seraph, this mysterious Sybil, Drury felt offended to the soul.

He was very silent as they drove along, but George himself was too full of garrulous talk to notice that. At last they came into the presence of the bride, whom they found dressed and waiting for them.

The two men looked at her, each after his kind—one with glee, the other with worship.

Her gray traveling dress was made so plainly that it left her figure as free from ornamentation and adornment as the ar-

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rangement of her hair left her face. She was a little creature, so slight and girlish that she would have looked far younger than her age but for the expression of her eyes. Those eyes, however, with their somewhat heavy lids and deep, peculiar setting, were made to be plaintive, and perhaps no excess of joy could cause them to look otherwise.

It was not a surprise to Drury to hear that she played the violin, but the way in which this knowledge came to him added another shock to those which this day's experience had already given him.

A servant was carrying bags, rugs, etc., to the carriage, when some one said, suddenly:

"Why, Sybil, where's your violin? I did n't think even a husband could replace that."

Drury saw that she flushed slightly as she said:

"I'm going to leave it."

"By special request," said Churchill,

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laughing. "Do you suppose I am going to have her mooning over the violin, when I want her to moon over me?" he added in an aside to Drury. "That's not my idea of a honeymoon."

He laughed at his joke, but it seemed to Drury so absolutely offensive that, for the first time, he asked himself whether it might not be that this attractive young fellow had a streak of coarseness in him.

Strong as were these various currents of feeling in Drury's heart, there was a yet more significant one which dominated now. He had been long in meeting his ideal; the meeting had been brief and superficial, and now the parting was at hand, a parting which by his own decree was to be eternal. He could not bear to see Sybil again.

When she came and put her little hand — by some chance ungloved — into his, to say good-by, she never dreamed that what was to her a mere friendly leave-taking was to him a tragedy.

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“We are going to see a great deal of you in the future, are n't we?” she said. “That is one of the good things George has promised me. You do not know how large a part you have played in our intercourse. He has often told me that he believed that he won me by his descriptions of you!”

She laughed in sheer mockery of this thought, and he was aware that, as she left her hand in his, she had a prompting of real affectionateness toward him. This, however, was of so vicarious a nature that he felt no pleasure in it. He was only of importance to her as her husband's friend, and that touch upon his palm seemed to leave his heart more desolate.

It was soon gone, and he was standing on the steps straining his eyes after the carriage which was to bear her out of his sight forever!

III

Drury carried out his plan and went to Africa. The scheme of the expedition differed radically from the former one, being more important in its aim and vastly more dangerous.

If young Mrs. Churchill could have known how significant a factor she was in all this it would have filled her with a surprise which nothing short of a knowledge of Drury's secret attitude toward her could have done away with.

Heretofore Drury's public-spiritedness and love of adventure had been in a measure subservient to the common human ends with reference to which most men shape their lives. His friends and relatives accused him of indifference to their hopes and wishes concerning him, but in

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reality he had looked forward to ultimate conformity and a settling down to marriage and an ordinary man's existence. This, however, was in the days of the unrealized ideal; but now that he had seen her in the flesh, and had given his services in making her the wife of another man, the face of all life was changed for him. He would have owned without hesitation that he held life's greatest reward to be the possession of the perfect woman for his wife; but now that that unique creature was married to another man, the best he saw possible for him was the effort to carry out certain suggestions which had come into his mind during his former African expedition. This was rendered the more practical by the fact that he no longer had any incentive to preserve intact the fortune which he had inherited, since he should have no descendants to leave it to.

Accordingly he fitted out an expedition at his own expense, and sailed for the dark continent in pursuance of a carefully

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considered plan, by which he hoped to make some explorations which would be of signal importance to science and modern progress.

In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Churchill went to housekeeping in one of the suburbs of New York, and life for them, as well as for Drury, seemed to have taken its final and definite direction.

Time passed, and seemed to bring to the young pair only prosperity and satisfaction. George, who was an enthusiastic athlete, was supremely happy in being in a place where polo, golf, rowing, and all such sports abounded, and also within reach of good hunting and fishing. In these pursuits most of his waking hours were passed. Sybil, who would, if encouraged, have tried to identify herself with her husband's interests, was prevented by his avowal that he did not like a sporting woman. She was so spared an effort that would have irked her, but the present conditions left her much alone.

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Under these circumstances she took up her violin again, and practiced with such devotion that she became quite famed for it in her somewhat narrow circle, and was frequently urged to play at charity concerts or musical parties. Her husband, however, said that he had never liked to see women make themselves conspicuous by their music, and so she declined such opportunities and played only at home—where she was rarely listened to!

It was fortunate that she cared for books, and during his continual absences she spent her time chiefly in reading or in practising. They were looked upon as a happy and fortunate couple—a thing which neither of them would have for an instant denied.

Within a year a baby came, and on this child Sybil fixed her ardent heart. Her husband's unconcealed disappointment that the child was a girl seemed to make the mother's love the tenderer. To feel this little being's dependence upon her was a new and peculiar joy.

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The thoughtful look on Sybil's face intensified. She read books which strengthened her mind and broadened her nature, and the birth of her child seemed to open up to her endless vistas of deep, fervid meditation. In the sort of reading to which she was naturally attracted her husband had no interest. He read chiefly sporting books and periodicals. The newspapers he scanned principally for tidings of the Drury expedition. Drury was quite a hero among men during that time, and the occasional tidings of his dangerous progress toward the interior were a fertile source of gossip at the clubs.

Occasionally a letter would come from him, such letters as he had never dreamed of writing to a friend before. These Sybil read with avidity, proud that her husband should be the chosen friend of such a man. This was undoubtedly her first interest in the letters, but she would not have been the intelligent creature that she was if she had not felt, in those messages, so graphic

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with both the external and internal life of the writer, an interest due only to their intrinsic significance.

It had been Churchill's hope that he might have a son, to be called Philip Drury. He wrote this to his friend when he announced the baby's birth. He failed, however, to make any mention of the mother.

The answer to his letter, when it came at last, was so full of interest and feeling for both child and mother that Sybil thought again how wonderful her husband must be to be so loved by such a man.

That was the last letter from Philip Drury for many a day and month. Soon after its date the writer passed from the world's ken, and with a small, well-disciplined escort disappeared in the interior of the country, where it might be that years would pass before he should be heard from.

In reality it was almost two years before tidings from the Drury expedition

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came, and by the time that the papers announced that the survivors, after desperate hardships and dangers, were on their way homeward, Sybil Churchill had entered into her second year of widowhood. Her husband had been killed by an accident, and she was alone in the world. She had no near relatives of her own, and the Churchill family, with whom her acquaintance was slight, was living abroad and did not especially interest themselves in her.

She remained where her husband had left her, leading a most secluded life, her child almost her only companion, for she was not a woman to make intimacies easily. She waited anxiously until the being should return to whom her husband, in his brief space of consciousness between injury and death, had committed her and his child. "Philip Drury will help you," he had said; "tell him I leave you and the baby to his care. Take his advice in everything, for you can trust no one else as you can trust him."

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These had been almost his last conscious words, and she had written them to Drury as soon as she could nerve herself to write at all. For, though healthy, Sybil was constitutionally frail, and this blow had almost paralyzed her powers for awhile. It was the child who had proved at last a summons strong enough to call her back to life and its demands and duties. When, for her child's sake, she undertook to look into her husband's affairs, a condition was revealed before which she felt herself absolutely helpless. She got some assistance from a lawyer, but she put off everything, as far as possible, until the person should come to whom her husband had committed her. While he had lived his wish had been her religion, and it was so still.

So when Philip Drury emerged from his long banishment and had put into his hands his immense accumulation of mail matter, and was making some effort to classify his letters according to date, it was

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a shock that vibrated through all his being when, after collecting two or three from Churchill, dated over a year back, he held in his hands one from Sybil, in an envelope bordered with black.

He had never seen her handwriting before, but he knew it intuitively, and putting things together he guessed at its contents. Long afterward he had time to think how strange it was that he should have recognized a hand which he had never seen, but at the time he had absolutely no room in heart or mind for anything but overwhelming pity for her. He thought of poor George then, and how sad and untimely this end of his bright existence was. Only long afterward did he think of himself and of any possibility that might be opened to him by this event.

Even when this thought did come to him, it was too tempered by uncertainty to have any element of elation in it. He knew that she was just the sort of woman to consecrate herself to an ideal. He was

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so consecrated himself, and he knew the thralldom of it. Besides all this, he had been so long exposed to peril, his old life and its issues seemed to cling to him by so slight a tenure that it was hard for him to have any realizing sense of himself in this new position. He was a good deal depleted by fever and hardship, and life from that point of view seemed very unreal.

When he had read Sybil's letter, however, a note of distinctness sounded in his consciousness. She delivered her husband's dying message, and she said that, sooner than depend on other help, she would wait for him indefinitely. She would do the best she could until he came, but she did not feel that in all the world there was any one else upon whom she could and would depend.

After this Drury's progress back to civilization was a more tedious and irksome delay than any which he had endured in his long banishment. The thought that

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she needed him and waited for him was a spur which even his late important aims and interests had not furnished.

He was returning in comparative triumph and success. The expected ends had been approximately accomplished and important services had been rendered. Ovations of enthusiasm awaited him in Europe and America, and it was impossible for him to escape these wholly. Chafing under the delays which kept him away from Sybil, he was obliged to be present at banquets and public meetings, accounts of all of which Sybil read in the daily papers.

She had not formerly cared to read newspapers, but now that they were ringing with tribute to her husband's friend, they had a new interest for her. How sad, how bitterly hard it seemed that George could not see the triumph of this being, who of all men he had most admired and loved !

She would often take her little girl upon her lap and tell her about it, representing

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"Uncle Philip" as a mighty hero, and putting his dangers in the form of great wild beasts, which, of course, made the strongest possible appeal to the infant imagination. So to little May, also, he had become a hero.

Sybil was grown more lovely since marriage and motherhood had come to her. Her husband had been more than ever dear and sacred to her as the father of her child, and even the pain of widowhood had made its impress of beauty upon her face. Her life with George Churchill had been far more apart than what she had conceived of it before marriage, but she had conformed her conceptions of both husband and father to the actuality as it existed before her, and she had asked no more.

IV

When, escaped at last from a host of demands and even engagements, Drury found himself in Sybil's little drawing-room, waiting for her to come to him, it seemed to be his first real pause since he had left Africa.

He stood upright in the center of the room. He felt no need of support. All his nerves and sinews were braced to endurance as they had not been in any of his recent dangers.

But when at last she softly entered the room, his head seemed to grow for an instant light and dizzy, and he caught at the back of a chair. Recovering himself quickly, he came forward.

She was in dense black, a fact accentuated by the whiteness of the dress worn by the little creature carried in her arms.

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“I have brought your god-child to see you,” she said. The tears not visible in her eyes were in her voice.

As she sat down on a sofa, still holding the child, she gave him her hand, and with it a full, direct gaze.

No words were needed. It was a look of unreserved self-revelation. It told him that the worst had come to her and that she sought his help in bearing it.

He met, comprehended, and answered that look. But he did not speak. Bending toward the child, and raising its face to his, with a hand beneath its little chin, he looked deep into its innocent, uncomprehending eyes with a gaze of promise which he would not have dared to bestow upon the mother. Then, fervently; he kissed the little lips twice.

Sybil saw the look and comprehended the pledge which he had made in those two kisses.

“Who is it, darling?” she said.

“Unker Fip,” said the child.

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With a passionate movement Sybil drew the little creature against her heart and bent her lips upon the tiny head. Then she looked at the man beside her. It was an eloquent look: "She is all I have," it said.

He understood indeed—too well, alas! He had seen this woman but once before. Then it had been in her marriage dress, and now she wore the dark insignia of death. Why was it, he wondered, that she should seem less a victim now than then? He could not bear to think of her being led to the altar adorned and veiled. He had never quite liked it in the case of any woman. It seemed to make too fitting the phrase in the Russian marriage ceremony, "Here, wolf, take thy lamb." She seemed to him somehow to have been sacrificed.

Yet never for an instant had he doubted her love for her husband. It must have been that George Churchill, even with the glamor of sudden and early death about

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him, seemed unworthy of her! But so would another man have seemed — so he seemed to himself far more than ever.

If Sybil had appeared to him lovely as a bride, as a widow she was adorable. He saw her now more nearly and intimately than he had then, and, except for the child, they were alone together. Perhaps they both felt it almost too acutely, remembering the one who was absent.

She was very anxious to be calm and restrained and not to give way to tears. She feared that if she should look at him the mutual consciousness would be too much for her. So she looked only at the child as she said :

“Unker Fip is very good to us, Baby May. He has come across the big ocean just to help us.”

“Ah, Baby May, he would die to do that!” answered Drury, laying his great brown hand upon the tiny pink one, and stroking it softly.

“He is our best friend in all the world,

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Baby — don't forget that, ever," said Sybil, stroking the child's soft hair.

"He wants to be, dear Baby," said the big, sunbrowned man, his voice and touch inexpressibly tender. "It is the best good the world holds for him now — the greatest thing that he can ever hope to do."

Up to this time the child had been rather overawed by her introduction to this stranger, of whom she had been told such wonderful things, but gradually she had been getting familiarized with him, and reminded by his last words of the achievements that she had heard attributed to him, she looked eagerly up into his face and said:

"Zoo soot taggers?"

The mother was about to interpret, but Drury had understood.

"Yes, Baby," he said, "I'll shoot every tiger of every description that ventures to threaten your little life with danger. That's the kind of tigers I'll kill for the future."

"Mamma, too?" queried the child, as

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if she felt unsatisfied until he had declared himself mamma's champion and defender as well as hers.

"Yes, mamma, too," said Drury; "but I fancy you are tiring mamma. Come to 'Unker Fip' and let him hold you."

Almost to the surprise of the mother May allowed herself to be lifted into Drury's lap.

Standing the little creature on his knee, he kept his arm about her, while she unhesitatingly clasped his neck and laid the fairness of her cheek against his bronzed face.

Sybil thus left to herself, at the other end of the sofa, sat with her small hands folded on her lap, where they looked ethereally white and fragile against the intense black of her gown. She was thinner than when Drury had seen her last, and her smallness and frailness made a pathetic appeal to the powerful man.

"I generally hit it off with children," he said. "This is the first child as to

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whom I have ever felt conscious of real nervousness. When I thought of the possibility of this child's not liking me, I almost trembled. It would have been a greater blow to me than you can well imagine."

"How he must have loved his friend!" thought Sybil, fervently; and Drury, reading her thought in her glance, felt ashamed, for it was only because this was the child of Sybil that he had had that dread.

In a few moments the nurse arrived to take the little girl away. She showed some reluctance at leaving, but Drury persuaded her to go. It was evident that she had a disposition to do what obliged him. She stipulated that he was to carry her to the door on his shoulder, and having done so he came back to Sybil.

She looked up at him with a little distressed glance that made a strong appeal to him. He saw that she scarcely dared trust herself to speak.

"There are no words to be spoken

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between you and me," he said, as he took his place at her side again. "We understand each other. You and that child are henceforth the most sacred trust, the most important business of my life."

The eloquent look with which she thanked him smote his heart. He knew that she conceived this pledge of service to be his tribute to his friend, while he realized that if this divinely precious woman had never seen or been seen by George Churchill his feeling about her would have been the same.

"How good you are!" she said. "How perfectly you understand! I cannot talk about it yet. It is still too new and too near. That is why I shrink from people — even his mother and sisters. They would want to talk to me about it, and that I cannot bear. I'll get better after awhile," she added, with a look of brave purpose in her face. "I have his child to live for, and I will do my best, but it is too soon to talk about it now."

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“Why need you talk about it ever?” he said. “It is in both our hearts. We have the whole deep knowledge there. Words would only hurt and hinder.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you!” she said. “You are the only one who really understands.”

He saw that the tears had risen to her eyes, and that her voice was trembling dangerously. He could not bear it. He got up and walked to the other end of the room, and stood for some moments looking out across the lawn. Then he turned his head, and, without otherwise moving or speaking, looked at Sybil.

She was seated where he had left her, but she had turned away from him, and, with her head bent backward on the sofa, she sat with her handkerchief pressed against her eyes.

He longed inexpressibly to go to her and comfort her. He could not do the former, but a way now occurred to him by which he might possibly do the latter.

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There was a piano just beside him, and he moved softly to the stool and opened it. With firm, sure touch he struck a deep chord. He felt the strength and aspiration of his soul go into that sound, and he felt that it passed therefrom into the spirit of the woman yonder.

He could not see her face, he could only dimly see the outline of her black-clad figure, but he played on, the strong, sonorous chords hushed into gentleness by the pity of his heart.

He felt himself talking to Sybil as he could not dream of doing in words. He had never had such utterance to give forth before, and surely, though he was a good musician, he had never played as he was playing now!

What it was that he played he did not pause to think. It came to him — that mingling and paraphrasing of various dear melodies by which his spirit reached towards hers.

It was a long time that he sat there, ten-

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derly touching forth those sweet, low notes that carried a strong message of endurance to her heart. He felt that he was telling her that life was not all, even death was not all — that something sweet and precious must exist beyond, which would be eternal.

And the comfort which he offered her he felt himself. "Anything that could end was too short!" One feeling of his heart, at least, he knew to be eternal. There had never been a time when there had not existed for him the lady most perfect. Such a time could never be. He might not be able, in all his human life, to tell her this in articulate words, but he thanked the good God for making music, and he felt that there would always be that communication between his soul and hers.

So he sat there, as the twilight gathered, and played his heart out to her, and whether she understood one tithe of it or not, he felt that she was comforted.

V

There was a great deal of business to be transacted in connection with George Churchill's estate. It was not a large one, and Sybil had no property of her own, so it was the more necessary that what was left to her should be managed with carefulness and judgment.

These two qualities had been conspicuously lacking up to the present time. Drury was shocked to see how heedless and neglectful Churchill's management had been, and he set to work to square things up as far as possible.

In the letter which George had written him at the time of the baby's birth he had especially committed the child to him, saying, in the tentative and confident way in which men do say such things, that in case

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anything unforeseen should come to him, he relied on Drury to act for him as his most trusted friend. He had said the same as to Drury to his relatives, and they were more than willing to consent to such an arrangement.

It was therefore entirely natural that Drury should be a great deal with Mrs. Churchill, and the retirement of her place, which was in the country, prevented any detailed knowledge of what went on there.

It was summer-time, and Drury went out from the city almost daily, and spent hours, either in Churchill's library, going through his papers, or else with Sybil, trying to solve and straighten out difficulties. The fact that he was a lawyer by education stood him in good stead now.

Every day, almost every hour, he was confronted with the self-indulgent carelessness or ineffectualness of the man whose papers were now passing through his hands. There were, moreover, such endless communications concerning dogs,

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horses, guns, fishing-tackle, and sporting matters, and to these such undue importance and prominence seemed to be given that Drury often shrank from having the tenderly loving and grieving widow to draw some of the inferences which he drew.

A question which he had sometimes asked himself before came home to him now with insistency. It was this: Take away from George Churchill the charm which came from his good looks, good humor, and youthfulness, what would remain?

To tell the truth, he had been subjecting his young friend to a very critical analysis, from the time of his marriage, and he had failed to see much beyond these qualities in him. These existed, it is true, in an eminent degree, and he could scarcely wonder that they had been enough to win an exquisite woman's love. But to keep it? Ah, it might be well for George Churchill, well for Sybil, perhaps, that he had died early!

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He found from her slight and superficial knowledge of her husband's doings how much their lives had been apart. It also leaked out in his talk with Sybil that she had been accustomed to practice several hours daily on her violin, up to the time of her husband's death. "Only when I was alone," she had added, quickly, as if anxious to free herself from the imputation of having possibly been annoying to her husband. Drury said nothing, but he drew his inferences.

All the time that they were sorting papers together, or talking about investments and securities, his heart was absorbingly preoccupied with the thought of her; but of this she was as unconscious as a child. She had asked him to call her Sybil in that meeting long ago, but he could not bring himself to do it without difficulty. It was a privilege so dear that he almost shrank from taking it. But the alternative of saying "Mrs. Churchill" was more difficult still. While her husband was liv-

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ing he had compelled himself to think of her by that name, but now why should he? This question led the way to other and deeper ones. Why was it that, in the cases of other widows he had known, he had compelled himself to think of them as the wives of their dead husbands, and would have been keenly shocked to think of them otherwise? Was it simply because this woman was his ideal lady? He was resolutely honest, and he knew that it was not that.

By deep and searching thinking he made out a theory about it. In cases where perfect union had existed in marriage, death did not dissolve it; but any marriage where there had not been such a union, death ended and obliterated. In this case it was impossible that such a union could have existed; the materials were too diverse for fusion. He was sure that Sybil had never been George Churchill's wife in the subtle sense of psychical union. That was supreme, and so death had set

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her free of Churchill and of every obligation to him.

But how if she did not see it so and would not so acknowledge it? He knew that her belief in her love for her husband was perfect. If their marriage had been to some extent a disappointment (and no power could convince him but that it had!) she no doubt ascribed it to the faultiness of human conditions, and probably believed it to be as perfect a union as was compatible with the existing order of things.

Ah, if it might be given him to show her otherwise! Her husband had loved her, of course, but what was mere love? What a slight, cheap, common thing it was, which the boor and the savage, the boy and the girl, the ignorant and trivial, experienced also! How inferior, how worthless was mere love, compared to the love with which there went congeniality of thought, aspirations, and ideals—the mysterious psychical mingling of the man and woman spirits born to be mates!

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He would be called sentimental, no doubt, if he were known to hold such ideas as these; but they were his dearest possession, and he knew that he would rather lose his hold on life itself than on them.

And as surely as he had always believed that this was the woman created in bodily form to realize his dream of perfect womanhood, just so surely did he now believe that he was made for her. Already, even through such restricted intercourse, protected as they both were by their consciousness of the past, there had come to him such revelations of the peculiar congeniality between them as to startle him. He could see also that, whether she wished to give evidence of it or not, her settled sadness was often penetrated by a consciousness of the same fact. They found frequently that they loved the same books, and had memorized the same passages in them, and at the times of such discoveries they could not help looking at each other with delight.

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After such an experience, however, Sybil would invariably retire into herself more closely, as if she reproached herself that she could have felt that spontaneous pleasure. At this the very depths of Drury's soul protested. How false one might be in adhering to what appeared a true ideal! What radical, uncompromising heart-searching was necessary to be true to truth! He knew that truth to truth involved, in many a heart, falseness to what was dearer than truth. He had a distinct conception of that type of woman. He knew that, with her, what her soul had, in its fresh young fervor, accepted as truth was liable to exercise a stronger sway than any pure abstraction of truth which wider knowledge and deeper experience might reveal. Conventions, traditions, accepted opinions, had, as he knew, great weight with all humanity—with women more than with men—and with this one woman, because of her very womanliness, he con-

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ceived that these would be powerful, perhaps supreme.

As he sat alone with Sybil and played to her during long and wordless hours, the thought that dominated him and was his strongest and highest appeal to her was this idea of truth to truth. He could not tell her so in words, but he strove by the help of music to lift her to that high plane. Music as a vehicle for sentiment and emotion he believed in absolutely, but here was something which had to do with reason and conscience and duty. That was the appeal which he longed to make to her. But the difficulties in his way were great.

VI

One evening Drury had been playing a long time, while Sybil sat some distance off, listening, as her manner was, with her face averted. Often at such times he had been conscious that she was crying gently, but he had never made any effort to check these tears. He felt that they were Nature's unction for her wounded heart, and that their effect at last would be to heal. They were tranquil, unembittered tears, and he trusted that by encouraging her to be wholly natural with him he might approach her the more intimately and simply.

This evening he had been playing with a feeling she had not known in him before. He was conscious of it, and of its source. It was not the passion of his heart for her, as man loves woman. That

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was in abeyance now. What he felt was a fervid necessity that she should realize the divine duty of keeping faith with truth.

Leaving the piano abruptly, he came to a seat facing her, and found her in tears.

He said nothing until she had stanchd the flow of these and recovered herself sufficiently to sit upright and look at him, with a brave effort at a smile.

He did not, however, return the smile.

"Sybil," he said, gravely, using a tone that she did not know in him, "why do you try to smile, when your heart is so heavy?"

The question took her by surprise. She looked at him with wondering silence.

"Try to answer me," he said. "It is very hard—one of the hardest things in the world, perhaps—for people to be perfectly honest with themselves and with each other. To many, I believe, such truth is impossible, but I believe that it might not be with you and me. You have heard of the Palace of Truth. I should

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like to erect such a structure about you and me, that we might live in it always. But in that dwelling-place, Sybil, there could be no such thing as a surface smile, no matter how sweet and unselfish the feeling which might prompt it. Would you be willing to go into residence there with me?"

He smiled himself as he said it, a smile which rose directly from a heart that gladdened at the thought.

"You do not answer," he went on. "Then let me try to answer for you. It was because you wished me to believe you more hopeful than you felt that you smiled above your tears just then. I wish you would never do that. I wish you could feel it in your heart to offer me the tribute of perfect truthfulness. I cannot bear the thought of your pretending to me to be one whit less unhappy than you really are. Weep if your heart is sore; when the wound has bled enough it will stop of itself."

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He paused suddenly. A look in her eyes, brief but keen, had checked him—a look of dread, so he interpreted it in his heart, as he said:

“Since I also am in the Palace of Truth, I will tell you what I understand your feeling to be now. The thought that your wound might cease to bleed alarmed you. Is it not so?”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes!” she said, lacing her fingers together and pressing them in hard constraint against her knee. “I could not bear that thought. I do not want the wound to cease bleeding. I should feel myself a faithless woman if it ever did.”

“Faithless to what? You must keep faith with truth before every other allegiance. If you listen to any other voice than that which speaks from above to your soul, the revelation of the highest cannot come to you. I tell you this, my friend, because I see that you are in danger—a danger which continually besets good

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women in your case, and the sweeter, the more loving they are, the more liable to this danger are they. It consists in a mistaking of artificial feelings for true ones—or rather, I believe I should not err if I said a preference for artificial feelings over true ones, if the former better coincide with the ideal of conduct which a widow is apt to lay down for herself.”

It gave him a little pang to apply this name to her, and he was afraid that he had wounded her by it, but a certain amount of ruthlessness was essential for the carrying out of his purpose, and he must not shrink from it.

“You are a most sensitive being,” he went on, “and you have had a crushing blow from which your whole nature totters yet. You have had the prop against which you rested wrenched away, and it will take all the stamina that is in you to stand upright, as you must do for the sake of your child. Your only helps in this are God and Nature. When God’s voice

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speaks to you, Sybil, stop and listen to it, and dare to hear the truth. When Nature would assuage and soothe, give place to her. What I dread for you is the demon of morbidness which so possesses women. I cannot think that it could get much foothold in a spirit as simple and sincere as yours, but I would have you guard against it. I beseech you, for the sake of those most dear to you, the living and the dead, to open your heart instead of closing it, and to keep your mind ever open also to the voice of truth. I tell you all this, my beloved friend, because I am going away, and I wish to leave you free, for God and Nature to do their work in you."

He heard himself utter the words, and he knew that they committed him. Now that he had said that he was going, he must go. He had not meant to go quite yet. There were reasons still which would serve for excuses to detain him longer, but to-night, as he had made bold to approach her more directly and personally than ever

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before, he felt a sense of danger that alarmed him.

She looked so frail, so young, so beautiful to-night. The agitated and half-distressed seeking of her eyes for his, in order that she might better comprehend his meaning, made the self-restraint extremely difficult, and he was afraid to trust himself to stay. It was not that he was afraid of any utterance or avowal of his feelings—that, of course, he could provide against—but afraid that some involuntary look or word might give rise to a suspicion in her heart, and he felt that the merest glimmer of such a thing would antagonize her to him forever. It was a sufficient danger-signal, to see that she looked grieved and disappointed when he spoke of going, and that her dear voice trembled as she said:

“Must you go already? You have been very, very good to stay so long.”

“Yes, I must go,” he said, “to-morrow. I am pressingly called.”

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"You will come back?"

She said the words as if in hesitation between doubt and fear.

"Yes, I will come back," he said. "If you need me really at any time, you are to send for me, for you and the child are my chief care in life now. If all goes well with you, however, if you can get on without me, I may not come for some time. I have made engagements in Europe which may detain me. Meanwhile, Sybil, make me the promise that I ask. Try to compel yourself to be true to the highest truth. Life is hard enough at best, God knows, but you sweet women often make it harder than it need be."

"I will try," she answered, "but I do not want relief and happiness except just so much as is needed to keep me brave for my work in the world, which is my child—my child and his!"

He could not answer. Her trust in him and in his comprehension of her was too dangerous to him. He did comprehend

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her. He felt that he knew her very soul, but if she believed that the husband she had lost had called forth her best love—had realized her own conception of love—then in his heart he felt that she did not know herself.

Drury's resolution to go immediately had been suddenly taken. The intensity with which he longed to stay another week had compelled him to decide on taking to-morrow's steamer. A more direct personal consciousness had been created between them by this recent talk, and he was afraid to linger near her—not so much afraid of spoiling his chances with her (for on that point he was too much in doubt to presume at all) as of alienating her from him to such an extent as would stand in the way of his service to her and the child.

That little creature had become devotedly attached to him, while he in his turn had a strange and powerful feeling for her. It was an exquisite delight to him to

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carry her about in his arms and to feel her little hands clasping his neck. He had loved many children and been loved by them, but this was Sybil's child, and there was a quality in this intercourse which was divinely precious to him.

Sometimes, when they were quite alone, out under the dense shade of the shrubbery, he would do strange things. He would look long into her innocent, uncomprehending eyes with a consciousness that his love for Sybil shone so patently in his own that any one but a baby would be able to see it there. He even talked to the child about it, making his confession in such ambiguous language as she could not understand—sometimes uttering it passionately in French or German. It served his purpose and gave him a pleasant consciousness that May was in his secret, and what lover does not want a confidant, provided that that rarely endowed being is to be had?

It was just as he was bracing himself

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to say good-by to Sybil that May came in, escaping from her nurse. She was at the age when children run more naturally than they walk, the increased momentum making it less difficult to keep steady on inexperienced feet.

As she trotted swiftly over the floor now, veering with a pretty awkwardness around one or two obstructing pieces of furniture, both Drury and Sybil, who had caught sight of her at the same moment, held out their arms simultaneously. They were a little apart, and the child, starting toward her mother, and then seeing Drury's look of affectionate invitation, changed her course, and with a lurch of her little body, not yet quite active enough in obeying the brain's dictates, fell to the floor between them and began to cry.

Simultaneously they sprang forward to lift and comfort her. In doing so their hands met, and each, after his or her consciousness, realized that touch. Sybil, full of regret at the approach of the parting

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moment, felt comfort in that contact with the strong supporting hand, which, beneath hers, was helping her to raise the child. What Drury felt was a thing so much more poignantly sweet than this that he pulled his hand away, even while her own grasp lingered. Then, having placed the child upon her mother's lap, he stood up to say good-by.

May, who had been only scared, not hurt, was smiling now, and as if realizing that her mother was having more than a half share of her precious self, she reached out and caught Drury's hand, trying to pull him nearer. He held himself erect, however, and did not yield to her weak little effort, as he said :

"I want you to make me a promise before I go, Sybil."

"What is it?" she said, in a tone of ready acquiescence, and with a motion of affectionate confidence she held out her hand to him.

Surely he saw it! Surely it was not

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possible that such a motion made directly under his eyes could have escaped him! And yet, after wavering a second, her hand fell to her side without his having made the least motion to clasp it.

A slight flush rose to her face, and she looked down at the child. When she again glanced up at Drury, she saw a deepening of color in his face also. This brought a consciousness that made her face burn scarlet. Drury saw it, and she saw that he saw it. Hastily taking the child from her arms, he strained the little creature to him, kissing it fervently.

"God bless you both!" he said, and then, clasping her hand, for a second only, he put May back into her arms, and was gone.

He had not even told her what the promise that he wanted was. Why not? What consciousness was it that had come between them.

Frightened, agitated, bewildered, Sybil carried May to the nurse, and then, lock-

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ing herself in her own room, fell on the bed, convulsed with sobs.

In the midst of the paroxysm she checked herself, and suddenly rose to her feet. What was she crying about? At the very mental hint of its being because of Drury's going the sounds in her throat were stilled and the flow of tears subsided. The past was stronger than the present yet! It was not for that that she had cried. She thought of Drury's appeal to her to be true, to search her own heart, and listen to the voice that spoke in it.

As she did so she became definitely aware of what the source of her tears had been. In that parting scene she had been compelled to face the consciousness that this man might occupy a more personal relationship toward her than that of her husband's friend — and not this man only, but other men! That was the thought that wounded her, and the very root of the bitterness lay in another fact, which made her shrink and tremble, while

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her cheeks grew hot. This was that it might become possible for her to occupy a more personal relationship toward this man — this man, Philip Drury, though no other !

Prompted by that honest heart-searching, to which she had pledged herself, in her recent talk with Drury, she saw staring her in the face a possibility which caused her to hate herself. She sat down on the side of the bed, and covered her eyes with her hands. She was trying to conjure up the image of her husband, that she might pledge herself to him anew in a passionate and eternal dedication. But as she did this Philip Drury's face and form rose up instead, adjuring her to be true to truth, even while she was struggling to be true to what her womanhood, her wifehood, her ideal of herself, insisted upon placing above truth. If she were not eternally faithful to her husband's memory, she argued, she ought to be ; and then that image of Philip Drury seemed

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to look into her eyes, as if he held the mirror of truth before them, and to say, "Why?"

She could not at once find an answer to this question, and the sense of her impotence oppressed her. She tried to think of George. How handsome he had been! But a nobler image arose and crowded out the other. She tried to get back a sense of companionship with him, but the deep consciousness of a better, richer, more satisfactory companionship possessed her memory and would not be subordinated to the other. There were certain phrases in which she had always been able to recall her husband's voice, but as she now reiterated the words in her mind, the insistent sound of that last fervid "God bless you both!" made a barrier which they could not penetrate.

At last this astounding truth rushed over her—that the image of her husband was in danger of suffering eclipse if this

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image of his friend were not put from her before it had come farther between George Churchill (her husband dead as well as living!) and herself. If she could forget him, and come to think of his friend as—but from the very thought of that her spirit turned and fled. She realized that it was fleeing from the Palace of Truth, because it lacked courage to remain there. This consciousness she could not escape. Philip Drury had declared that no fealty was so high as allegiance to truth, but she could not help it. That she—so recently become a widow—could entertain a thought of another man was, in this moment, far more intolerable to her than the thought of being false to abstract truth. If she did not love her husband, respect his memory, and own his rights over her, as she would have herself do, then she must act as if she did, and perhaps the comfort now foregone might come to her again—the thought that she was a true and faithful wife!

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Urged by this feeling, she went to her desk and wrote Drury a note. There was time for it to reach him on the steamer, and she felt that she must make her position more definite to him before he left America, where was his friend's body, and where was also the poor weak wife who seemed now too faithless ever to have been worthy of him !

In this mood she wrote him a rather chill note of thanks for all the trouble he had taken for the wife and child of his friend, and added that she knew that it had all been done for that friend's sake, and that she thanked him in his name.

As Sybil put her signature to this letter she knew that she had passed across the threshold of the Palace of Truth and that its door had closed behind her.

She rang, and ordered the letter to be posted, and then, in spite of herself, gave way to sobs.

VII

Few of us in this world are so fortunate as to preserve the true course unflinchingly. The best we can do is to keep to it in the main, so that if we have headed our little life-bark due north we get to the pole at last, though not without many veerings to east and west.

So, with Philip Drury it happened that as he drove through the streets of New York to take the steamer, instead of congratulating himself that he had done well he was half resentful over his lost opportunities. He could not even guess whether or not Sybil would ever be won to look upon him in the light of a husband, but at least she was now free and the way of approach to her was open. He was going to bring the greatest effort

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of his life to this suing; but the casualties of human existence were a terrific possibility, and it seemed almost madness to be putting the ocean between them. They were both young and healthy; but so had George Churchill been! Last time it had been his death that had come so unexpectedly. This time it might be hers! For several moments he dallied with the temptation to tell the driver to turn about and take him back to his hotel.

He was strong enough, however, to keep before him the principle which he had incorporated into his life as it touched hers, and he drove on to the steamer.

He went at once to look for his mail, and found several letters that he had expected, and a black-bordered one, in a familiar hand, which he had not expected. His heart throbbed. He could hardly keep a smile of self-betrayal from his lips and eyes. He went quickly to his stateroom, in order to read it alone.

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He stood and toyed with it a moment before opening it. How sweet it was of her to write to him on the steamer! She must care something to do that. How adorable she was! How exquisite! A keen memory of the delicious enchantment of her presence swept over him. He saw her seated, with May on her lap, holding out her hand to him. As if he could have borne to take it! The thought of it made him smile. His only possible course had been to ignore the sweet overture. If he had taken that hand and held it, all would have been over with him, one way or the other. The flood-gates would have been opened at that touch—the torrents have rushed through.

Being quite alone, and free to do a silly thing, he pressed his lips against the small black seal before he broke it and opened the folded sheet. His brows contracted as he read it. The coolness of it sent a little chill along his veins. But gradually

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his expression changed. The muscles of his mouth relaxed, and when he got to the end he smiled.

The smile deepened, as he read the brief letter through again. It was a very artless thing. The effort in it was so evident that Drury felt a real exhilaration from it. He recognized its spirit of compunction and asked himself what it was for. It was a letter which keenly piqued an answer. He remembered that the pilot would take letters back, and getting out the small leather writing-case which had been part of his African equipment he sat down and wrote her a cool and friendly letter, accepting everything on the lines which she had laid down. He took this and put it into the pilot's bag, and then made his way on deck, with a sense of elation in his heart.

That was the beginning of a long correspondence. Drury would not permit himself to write again until he got her answer to that letter. It was somewhat

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slow in coming, and when it came at last it gave him a heartache.

Sybil owned that she was miserably depressed, though she hastened to add that she neither expected nor desired to be otherwise. Drury thought of certain hours which they had spent together, reading, talking, finding out each other's tastes and their agreements and differences. In these hours there had been no depression! There was one thing only in this letter that gave him a little comfort, and that was that she reminded him of the request which he had spoken of and had not made, and she asked him to tell her what it was, that she might do it. Her life was so barren and useless, she said, that if there was anything that she could do to please a friend, especially one bound to her by such ties as he, she would be thankful to do it.

Upon the answer to this letter Drury brought to bear his utmost diplomacy. Never in any transaction of his varied and

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active life had he so weighed values and counted costs. Naturally an impetuous man, he forced himself to the most controlled deliberation in these letters to Sybil.

He soon became aware that he possessed a wonderful power of divination about her. His guesses as to her course in any given condition rarely went wrong, and his extreme efforts not to jar or wound her were usually crowned with success. Occasionally he would get a spontaneous letter from her in a tone of friendly cheerfulness, but these were always followed by reaction, which would show in the next.

He had one aider and abetter which he did not take into account. This was the public press. No woman is quite without the hero-worshipping quality, and it was impossible but that this man, who was her tender and considerate friend and helper in every big and little interest of her life, should have an added luster by reason of

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his public achievements and the enthusiastic tributes which they won for him.

Drury had written her that the favor he had wished to ask was that she would take up again her violin practice and be ready to play with him when they should meet again. Her response to this had been disheartening. She simply said that he had asked too much, as she felt that she would never play again. She added that if he really wished to please and help her, she begged him to believe her sincere in the statements of her feeling which she had made to him from time to time. It was neither possible nor proper, she said, for her to go on reiterating herself as to the way in which her past bore on the present, but he must accept her for what she was, a broken-hearted woman who had no motive for living except that which existed in her child.

When Drury read this letter he felt that the sacred Palace of Truth was quite

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vacant now, as far, at least, as Sybil's occupancy had gone. He had planted his foot there, however, and he pledged himself to stay and take the consequences.

About this time it happened that Drury fell ill. He would gladly have kept this knowledge from Sybil, but he was forced to break some public engagements, and every newspaper in the two countries seemed to have chronicled the fact. The accounts were a good deal exaggerated, for he was at no time in danger, but it served him a good turn, for it brought him a cable from Sybil, which set his heart to pumping its rather sluggish blood so valiantly that he declared it was the beginning of his recovery. The message had run thus :

Send me tidings. Am most anxious and
unhappy. S.

To this he cabled, in reply :

Infinite thanks. Am recovering. Sea voyage recommended. Will see you soon. P.

VIII

Sybil was alone in her own room when Drury's telegram was brought to her. She saw that the dispatch was a cable message, but would it be from him or — about him? Her anxiety invented a dozen terrible possibilities. She was afraid to open the yellow envelope. The intensity of her anxiety revealed to her plainly certain things which she had continually denied to her heart, but she was far too pre-occupied now to take account of that. All her soul was roused to fear. What would she do if this message contained the awful tidings which it might contain? What would become of her? She had said that she had no care, no interest in life except her child. It had been a falsehood, almost a deliberate one. Was she to be

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punished for that now? She felt herself trembling and turning faint. This suspense was terrible. At last, by a great effort, she tore open the envelope and read the message.

The reaction was so great that she was absolutely dazed. He was not dead or dying, then! He was getting well, and was apparently cheerful! He was coming to America! The direction of the prescribed sea voyage had no doubt been decided by himself. What if her cable had decided it? She did not want him to come to America, but how could she stop him?

Her deed was as an arrow loosed from the bow; it was impossible to recall it. The relief of knowing that he was not in danger was very great, but simultaneously with it came thoughts that tormented her. She tried not to think—to force her thoughts, at least into channels that led away from Drury; but the effort was futile.

She occupied herself with May until evening came and the child was put to

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bed. Then those dominating and insistent thoughts rushed back and fought so valiantly for the stronghold of her mind that at last, in desperation, she got out her violin and began to practice scales. She had often, long ago, used this method for the prevention of unpermitted thoughts, and she found that it served its purpose now better than anything else that she could do.

When she at last put the violin away, she was feeling calmer and more rational. She got out Philip Drury's letters resolved to read them all over with a view to the adjustment of future relations. They extended over many months, and were in many notes of grave and gay. Their perusal left her as confused and helpless as ever.

She had felt, a few hours back, that to see him no more was what she could not bear, but now the thought of seeing him seemed to tax her endurance almost as far!

IX

If ever a man came to a task with resolution, that was Philip Drury's state of mind when he arrived in America. He had settled up his affairs abroad and was now come to begin the real work and effort of his life in his own country. Banished forever were all thoughts of further African explorations. It was a fascinating field, but he had done his part, and there were others who would follow where he had opened the way. He had other plans in life which were quite as important, and perhaps more practical, and he could not now separate himself from the country in which Sybil lived, with no barrier to his possible winning of her.

In the early and ardent years of his manhood he had studied and thought much

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upon philanthropy and socialism; and although he had abandoned these avenues of effort for his African adventures, the impulses to which they had given rise had lain in the prepared soil of his mind and were now springing into life and ready to bear fruit. He had a good fortune of his own, and influence by which he could command the use of money; and more than this, he believed that certain ideas of his could, if put into practical operation, be made of use to his fellow-beings and his age.

The inertia which had possessed him for some years of his life, and which he had declared that civilization always engendered in him, was utterly gone. This fact he explained to his own heart by the influence which Sybil had brought to bear upon his life. She was his ideal lady, and he must try to do such deeds as might make him worthy to become her knight.

The fancy took him to come unannounced into Sybil's presence. He had not

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given her the name and date of the vessel by which he had taken passage. He had merely said that just as soon as he could settle up his affairs in Europe he would come to America, to remain permanently. Sybil's answer to his cable had been rather a chilling note, saying that the exaggerated newspaper accounts had been to blame for her impetuous and most unnecessary telegram, and that he had been very good not to be annoyed at it.

It was a warm day in early summer when Drury got off the train at the station near Sybil's pretty home, and walked the short distance that led through its wooded grounds to the house. There was no one in sight; but a few paces from the house he paused, checked by a sound, vibrating, resonant, piercingly sweet. It came from a violin played by practiced hands, out of the motive of a full heart. A sense of weakness seized him. Had he strength for the long siege and patient waiting that must be before this fortified and guarded

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heart would surrender to him? Would it ever so surrender?

Treading cautiously, he swiftly crossed the porch and approached one of the low windows that opened into the drawing-room. A line dividing the white muslin curtains gave him a full view of the interior of the charming room. Before a music stand, only a few paces from where he was, stood Sybil, dressed in white. Her loose sleeves fell backward from her fair and rounded arms, which were raised to violin and bow, while her body, slender and supple as a girl's, swayed slightly from side to side, accompanying the rise and fall of the exquisite music which she played. An open sheet was on the rack before her, but she merely glanced at it now and then, depending more upon her heart than her vision for the correctness of the strain.

Her profile was toward him, the coil of pale brown hair outlined distinctly above the exquisite *nuque*. The three little points

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at brow, temple, and ear were plainly visible, even to their shade of color, seeming to darken against the pure white of her skin. Below them, under dark brows almost level in their delicate sweep, looked out the plaintive eyes of Sybil, screened by long lashes and half-lowered lids. The straight nose, the distinct lips—the lower one slightly sucked in and drooping at the corners—the rounded chin curving into the white throat, against which the violin rested, all these things made up a vision before which his soul fell on its knees. In his body he remained intensely still, for she was very near, and the slightest motion might betray him. Now, as at some passionately loving strain that mounted piercingly high and sweet, she turned her face upward, with eyes and brows uplifted, too, as if to join in the exquisite aspiration, those beauteous eyes expressed so unconsciously the hunger of her heart that Drury feared and trembled. He could not bear it; it was too sweet.

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Turning, he made his way into the sheltered recesses of the garden, there to do battle with a temptation stronger than any he had yet endured, by so much as Sybil, in the self-betrayal of complete unconsciousness, was lovelier than either memory or imagination had pictured her. For many moments he remained there, walking restlessly up and down and digging his stick into the earth, as if eager for some visible, palpable obstruction to contend with in the place of these powerful intangibilities. When at last he dared to go forth, he walked resolutely toward the porch, stepped through the low window and entered the drawing-room, where Sybil stood before the music-stand as he had left her.

His entrance startled her, and she turned to look. Her hands fell, dropping bow and violin against her sides. A deep flush rose to her cheeks, a light to her eyes.

"Thank God for such a welcome!" he cried in his passionate heart, although an

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instant later her cheek had paled and her eyes dropped beneath the gaze of his. He clasped her hand a moment, taking from it the bow which she had forgotten to lay down; then he said, with a bold smile of joy, which he made no effort to suppress:

"I am fortunate to find you so. I like you in this white gown, Sybil, and I am delighted with your occupation."

She shrank and froze, as he had known she would; but there was ground that must be covered, there were words that must be spoken, before he could get near enough to make his fight for the fortified citadel and win the day, for win he would and should! Never had he felt so mighty a necessity of victory before.

"You should have warned me," she said, laying down her violin and sinking back into a chair. "You should not have taken me by surprise."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I was unprepared—"

"What preparation could you possibly

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want to receive me, Sybil? Surely we have got beyond such forms as that."

"Of course," she said, confusedly. "I understand that. But this dress! I wear it only in the morning, because it is so hot and no one sees me. It is n't suitable, I know. I had not expected to see any-one."

"Not suitable? A thin, white gown like that not suitable for a young, fragile woman in a hot climate? Dear Sybil, come back with me again into the Palace of Truth. Your feet have wandered of late. Life is so earnest; there is so much to do with it, and reality is the first essential in that work. The past is past, but there is one way by which we can make it worthy, and that is by evolving from it a noble present, out of which a high and splendid future may ultimately come. Make this use of your past, I beseech you, Sybil. The world's need is great. You have no right to fold your hands and turn away."

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"The world can have no need of me," she said. "Except to help my child, my life is useless."

"Do you think it is kind of you to forget me quite?"

"I do n't forget you. But you are a gifted and important man; you can live your life and do your service to the world without me."

"Suppose I say that I cannot? I will not say it, for a strong man ought to depend upon himself. What I will say, however, is that I cannot do half so much or so well without you. I need your help vitally; I should be crippled without it."

"My help? What can I do?"

"You can give me the inspiration of your presence and the consolation of your sympathy. Like many another who has failed, I have plans for helping the world. Perhaps it may be that I shall not fail. If I do, the mere effort will be a sort of success that I shall not despise. But, Sybil, I need you in this effort—your spiritual

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help, and your actual, practical help, too. I do not see my way to carrying it out without the aid of a woman's fine intuitions and effectual service. If, as you say, you feel your life useless, be my partner in this work."

The fire of his earnestness was not without its effect upon her. There seemed to come a sudden revelation of how little she had ever tried to do in discharging any duty that she owed to others besides her husband and child.

"I have been idle and indifferent, I fear," she said, "but it is partly because, though I have felt sorry for the trouble of the world, I have never had any idea that I could help it. I cannot possibly believe it now."

"Perhaps I can show you," he said. "My plans are at least thoroughly formulated and definite. Let me sketch them to you briefly."

All the while that he talked she listened with an ever deepening interest. It was

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an hour of soul-expansion, which did the work of many profitless years. It was as if in a sea of drowning myriads a great steamer had come in sight, manned and equipped to save some thousands, though the greater part should perish. Still, if help for some had come, help for more might be behind it, and she seemed for the first time to see the word Hope written upon the face of suffering humanity. Her countenance grew ardent with her deepened feeling.

"You have seemed to change the whole aspect of human obligation to me," she said. "Heretofore I have thought it enough if I could attain to blamelessness."

"Blamelessness," he said, "I hold to be a thing of very little worth. Mere rectitude of conduct can place no man or woman on a really high plane. Rather, far rather, I should prefer a character with generous faults, who commits wrongs and rises on them as stepping-stones to higher things. The men or women who go through

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the world merely blameless look out for themselves and their own security, no doubt, but how are others bettered by their lives? I have heard a man say vauntingly, in reprobation of another's fault, 'No man ever lost anything by me,' and I've thought, 'No, nor gained anything by you, either! You have gone through the world with clear skirts of your own, and have thought only of keeping them so. But have you ever helped any one?'"

Sybil looked at him with absorbed interest.

"Whether I can help you or not," she said, "I see already that you can and will help me. How callous and indolent I have been, when there is so much to do! You are very good to think me worthy of giving you help. I will do it if I can."

Drury's eyes kindled.

"Sybil," he said, "I cannot help you. You cannot get help unless you will be, before everything, honest and sincere. Even yet I can see that you are putting

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artificial restrictions on yourself, on your dress, habits, et cetera. Why is this? Is it because time and nature have done nothing in your case? Because your grief for your husband is absolutely unassuaged?"

She flushed hotly, and under his bold, direct glance her eyes fell.

"You are cruel," she said. "You have never been married, or you could not speak so."

"It is possible, of course, that I do not know myself," he said, "but I am certain that you are mistaken. If I had been married and had lost my wife, I think I should know, in looking back through the perspective of time, whether that marriage was the ideal union of man and woman or not; whether it fulfilled all the conditions—not only love, but congeniality, sympathy, combined spiritual endeavor, intellectual accord, and every element that makes for development, for the marriage which develops not misses the best aim and end of marriage. If I had been the

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blessed partner in such a marriage as that, I think I should well know that it was a blending of two souls for eternity as well as time, and that only by the plainest self-abasement could I have the thought of another marriage. But if it had been otherwise, I think I should not cheat myself, but should frankly own the truth. Shamings, sham spiritual doctrines, sham practice on a subject as holy and vital as love and marriage, these are the very worst of all."

He rose as he ended, and moved away from her, bending to read the title of the sheet of music on the stand, that he might relieve her from the embarrassment of his gaze. He knew he had been bold, perhaps rough—but these ideas must be got into her mind, and he could not beat about the bush. She did not love him—it was uncertain if she ever would; but if he ever won her, he must feel that her mind and will and spirit consented to him as well as her

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heart. It would be a victory for which he would not care if she came to him from mere love. That was his theory of her first marriage, and he felt that he would sooner lose her than have a repetition of the conditions which had governed that. He saw now that she was agitated and unnerved. With the hope of relieving her he said, still looking away from her:

"May n't I see May? Perhaps I have wearied you by my long talk, and you would like to go and rest. If you would let May come and talk to me—and forgive me, Sybil, if I have hurt where I so intensely wished and meant to heal. This issue between you and me is an all-important one, and there is no salvation for either of us but in absolute truth."

She did not speak, she did not even look toward him, as she rose and left the room.

X

Having sent May to Drury in the drawing-room, Sybil was now in her own apartment alone. She had locked the door behind her, and with an impulse to look herself in the face, she walked over to the mirror and stood there, her hands clenched together and her eyes, under contracted brows, fixed on their own reflection. Her breath came thick and short, and her lower lip was caught between her teeth. As she gazed into the reflection of her face a hot flush, seen in the image and felt in the reality, rose to her cheeks.

With a little cry she turned away and hid her face in her hands. Just as she saw herself in the mirror had Philip Drury shown her the reflection of her soul. She had struggled against the belief, but she

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saw now how little of real union there had ever been between George Churchill and herself; scarcely one point of contact except that of love—"mere love," as Philip had half-scornfully called it. They had loved each other—that she need not question—but when she asked herself if love alone could preserve the union of two souls, not otherwise united, her heart told her that it could not. Was it even sufficient for its own continued existence? Would it not have dwindled and diminished, as time went on? Had it not already sensibly done so, if she would honestly recall the last half of her married life and compare it with the first? She was bound to own this to herself, but she still struggled passionately against the thought of owning it to any other. Surely she was not bound to do this; surely she had a right to keep in her own heart a secret that was her shame!

Suddenly there came to her a swift vision of her husband as she had seen him last—the stalwart, bright young being, cut

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down at a blow and lying still in death—and the pity of it wrenched her heart with a new and keener sense of anguish than she had felt even at the time. Why was this?—she asked herself, and her heart was swift to answer. It was because the natural emotions of that hour had made him seem the unique desired, the eternally regretted of her soul.

In that time of her passionate and overwhelming grief her heart's apotheosis of him seemed to give a value and a luster to his individuality, in death as well as life, which, in spite of his sudden and untimely end, made it seem as if he had not lived in vain. But if this was no longer so, if with the perspective of time, the broadening of faculty, the development of moral consciousness, that high place was taken from him, and she gave him now, instead of an utterly false deification, nothing greater than a gentle love, a tender memory, a just estimate of his lovable but somewhat slight and shallow character,

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the gain she had made was abstract truth, which might pass into light and strength for her for the future, but was now a keen, pathetic pain. She was inexperienced in the realities of living, and she did not yet know how surely and strictly every gain is to be paid for. She had made her way to a new truth, and she was now paying for it in the acute pain of compunction. She called herself faithless. She said he would have loved her better. "But would he?" the voice of truth suggested. During their marriage her whole thought had been of him, while he had had a dozen absorbing outside interests. Was it then likely that, were conditions now reversed, he would be inviolately faithful to her memory, when she was not so to his? For Sybil now owned this defection to herself, though she fought pathetically for sanction from this new dictator in her conscience never to own it to another being. She thought of her husband with tears of poignant pity. Poor George! He had long

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been dead in the body, but it almost seemed to her that on this day his soul had died also, and that she had killed it!

There was no marked individuality in her husband for memory to fix upon,—no powerful, definite traits which seemed too strong to die, such as she well knew in another man! She made a gesture of protest, as if she would thrust from her a thought which made its approach to her boldly through the silence and the stillness.

For the return of Philip Drury, after the fright which she had had about him, had been a keen shock to her, whether of pain or pleasure she could not tell, they were so subtly mingled. Sharp, delicious little heart-pricks came to her now as she thought of him playing with May downstairs. Surely it was no wrong to any other that he had become her hero, her enthusiasm! Others felt the same who had not even seen him, for a magnetism went forth from him which had permeated

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every part of civilization and created a *culte* for him among both men and women. She read of it continually in the papers; she had even known instances of it in her own acquaintance. His desperate dangers and narrow escapes in Africa fired the sense of the romantic, and his personality, described with ardor by those who had seen him for the benefit of those who had not, gave the touch of grace and breeding and gentleness that made a fascinating blending of charm and courage.

As she thought of all this she felt a subtle influence drawing her toward the room where she knew that he was at this moment. She knew that he was thinking of her, and she was keenly aware that she had it in her power to go to him in such a spirit as to give him delight. It tempted her powerfully, in spite of the other feeling that fought against it.

She stopped and parleyed with this temptation. She need commit herself to nothing, only go down in the white dress he

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had been pleased to see her in, and talk to him and the child out of the spontaneous impulse of kindness and good will which was welling in her heart. She could even play him some of the music she had been practicing recently, without the least compromise of the position which her traditions declared appropriate for a woman placed as she was. It was what she longed to do, what nothing but her fear of subsequent regret held her back from.

Every moment the impulse was strengthening, and the reasons against it weakening, when there came a knock at the door. It proved to be May and her nurse, come to say that Mr. Drury had returned to town. He had left word that he had an engagement for the evening, but would come out again to-morrow morning to attend to some business matters with Mrs. Churchill.

XI

Sybil waked next morning with a sense of gladness in her heart—a consciousness of the nearness of some good and pleasant thing. With the realization of what that good thing was, there came again the shadow of compunction, but for the first time she deliberately exerted her will to drive it away.

After her breakfast with May she opened the morning paper. The first thing that met her eyes was a column on the front page beginning with the great head-lines :

“ Honors to Drury. Magnificent Banquet. Great Enthusiasm. Speeches by the Explorer and Other Distinguished Men.”

Her heart beat quickly. She was glad that only May was by to see the color that

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blazed in her face. She read through the two or three columns devoted to this subject and giving the speeches. At Drury's speech her enthusiasm positively exhilarated her; she read it twice, and then turned to the editorial columns. Here she found gravely considered the significance and importance of his achievements. It was a tribute which thrilled her with pride.

But as she put the paper down there was a mist before her eyes; all this seemed to give her a sense of her remoteness from him. She feared that she had exaggerated his interest in her. Of course, so great and good a man as this would be kind to all and faithful to every obligation! It was, perhaps, a species of conceit that had caused her to attach such significance to words and looks which might easily be made to wear a more indifferent aspect. A sense of fear seized her. If this should indeed be true! Once she had feared for the contrary.

During the hours that elapsed before she

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could reasonably expect him she went through so many changes of mood that any definite idea of what she really thought and wished would be impossible. She had guessed that he would come by the train which he had taken yesterday, and when that was nearly due she went to her room to prepare herself to see him.

As she stood before the mirror she was almost startled at her own loveliness. The pink color in her cheek, the sparkle in her eyes, gave her at first a throb of delight. Then there came a sudden and violent reaction. The vivid pleasure with which she was looking forward to this meeting shocked her.

She turned to her wardrobe to get out a dress for which to exchange the pretty *negligé* of her breakfast-gown. There were two dresses hanging side by side; one a clear, diaphanous white—fresh, hopeful, and girlish in its aspect, the other dense, sad, solemn black. The eagerness with which she longed to take the first made her choose

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the second. She put it on and turned toward the mirror to adjust it. Again she looked at the face reflected before her. It looked years older. The color had faded from it and the eyes were blurred and dull.

The whistle of a train blew, and she started. It was not his train, but the next one would be! Her heart began to beat violently at the thought of the nearness of his coming. How dull and ugly she looked in this black gown. She would not wear it! Hastily unfastening it she let it fall to the floor, and brushed it aside with her foot. Then, almost running to and fro, she brought the white one and put it on, a look of something like defiance in her face as she fastened it.

The transparent stuff revealed distinctly the charming modeling of her rounded arms, and the ruffle around the neck fell backward from the white, bare throat. The change was marvelous. She could not help smiling. She did not want to help it.

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A fit of recklessness was upon her, as she left the room and ran lightly down-stairs.

She went to the spot where he had found her yesterday, and took out her violin and bow. It exhilarated her to imagine the look of pleasure that would be on his face when he should step in between the muslin curtains and find her thus. She rejoiced that she had been so bold. She said to herself repeatedly that it was nothing. It committed her not in the least. She could draw back the first moment that she felt a sense of danger.

Sybil had no idea of any latent vein of coquetry in her, and yet it was that quality which gave a charm and piquancy to her appearance now that made her look absolutely bewitching. Hitherto unimagined dimples came to view and dallied about the corners of her mouth.

She had taken out her violin, but suddenly she felt that she dared not touch it. She was afraid of changing her mood. It was a rare feeling, this joyous, inconse-

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quent, childlike abandonment to feeling, which had seized her now. She wanted to cherish it, to woo the thoughts that would encourage it until he came.

The train whistled, and a little throb of fright pulsed through her heart. She realized that to a man who perhaps liked her a great deal already she would be dangerously charming to-day. She felt her cheeks burn, and she knew that her eyes were sparkling.

It was time for him to come. She heard the receding train blow distantly for the next station. He must surely be here soon! But the minutes passed, and he did not come. Presently it became certain that he could not have taken that train.

As Sybil realized this, a sudden and powerful revulsion seized her. He was no doubt detained in town by more important engagements! What an assumption she had been guilty of!

Humiliated and bewildered she left the drawing-room and fled to her own apart-

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ment. The emotional reaction of the moment filled her eyes with tears. Her throat ached. The spirit within her sagged and drooped like a wounded bird ; she was being punished, bitterly punished, for that mood of levity and vanity. She looked upon the fact of Drury's non-arrival as a sort of providence. She had been half wild, and what might not have happened ?

All day she went about despondent and confused. She had fully expected a telegram of apology and explanation from Drury, but it had not come.

Late in the afternoon, dressed in her dense black, she sat down on the porch to read to May. She hoped by the performance of this accustomed act to clear the bewilderment of her thoughts and feelings. It did not answer, however, for she found it impossible to attend, and the child complained that she could not understand her. It was a relief when the gathering shadows gave her an excuse to stop.

She and May had tea together, but still

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there came no sign or message. Then suddenly she began to get anxious. It was her custom to put May to bed herself, and stay with her until she went to sleep. She tried hard, however, this evening to keep the child awake. She felt inexpressibly nervous and lonely. She sat in the child's room until it was too late for any probability of Drury's coming, then, feeling half stifled by the heat, she put on a white gown and went outside under the stars.

XII

The garden was hushed and shadowy as Sybil wandered down the walk alone. It was not a prudent thing to do, but she was preoccupied by a fear that was stronger than any personal timidity. The papers had given accounts of many cases of prostration from the heat, some with fatal results, and remembering Drury's recent illness she felt acutely anxious about him. In her preoccupation she wandered far from the house, but suddenly realizing her unprotectedness, with a sort of loneliness in thought, she turned back. There were some wicker chairs outside the drawing-room windows, and she sat down in one of these.

The thought recurred insistently that Philip was ill or in some serious trouble.

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How much and how she cared for him she did not know, but it was enough to make the present separation and suspense almost unbearable. She longed to telegraph for tidings of him, but she knew she was not near enough for such a right as that. If he should be very ill she could not even go to him! At that thought a feeling within her cried aloud in protest. He must be ill or in some danger at this very moment, and of course no one would think of letting her know! She would read about it in the paper to-morrow, and then it might be too late!

She had wrought herself into such a state of nervousness that at the sudden sound of a footstep she started up with a palpitating heart, and at the sight of a dark figure emerging from the shrubbery she gave a little cry. The next second she had recognized Philip Drury with a revulsion of joy that so weakened her that, as she sank back into her chair, she felt a dizziness come over her which made

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it impossible for her to trust herself to speak.

He came close, and with a strong and tender touch took her cold and tremulous fingers into his warm clasp.

"What is it, Sybil?" he said. "Have I frightened you?"

"Oh, it is n't that!" she said, a trace of suffocation in her breath; "but I had been so uneasy about you. I thought you were ill or in some danger."

A slight sound escaped him, suggestive of a swift spontaneous smile.

"I hoped you would think that," he said. "I wanted you to be anxious. It was for that reason that I stayed away—to see if your heart would not make some self-revelation in my absence. I had meant not to come until to-morrow, but my resolution failed me."

She shrank a little.

"Do n't, Sybil," he said, coming to a seat very near her. "Do n't let yourself have any fear of me. I assure you that

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you need not. I am simply going to have an honest talk with you about some most important things—not important merely in the narrow sense which applies to you, but in the bigger sense which applies to all men and women situated as you are situated. I want you to be quite free and fearless with me and to answer me truly some questions. In the first place this: What do you hold to constitute the indissolubleness of the marriage tie?”

She did not answer, and, as if he did not wish to urge her into speech, he went on:

“We cannot say that it is love, because that can and will exist in conditions which destroy the possibility of high ideals. We cannot say, on the other hand, that it is either the legal contract or the church’s decree, for these are often empty forms in which love has no part. It therefore seems to me that where marriage is indissoluble it is so by reason of a true and perfect union between the body, mind, and

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spirit of a man and woman. For that marriage the words 'Till death us do part' are not needed. If life goes on at all for those two beings, that union must surely go on, too, I think, for without it they would cease to be themselves."

There came no answer.

"Are you listening, Sybil?" he said, bending so that he could look into her face.

"Yes," she murmured.

There was only that one word, but it had an inflection in it which conveyed to him not only attention, but agreement.

"Do you not think," he went on, "that a man or a woman who had once had part in such a union would be conscious of its nature without possibility of doubt?"

"Yes," she said again.

"And do you not think, also, that where such a union had not been, that man or woman's heart would know as surely

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and avow its denial—provided that it were an honest heart?”

“Yes,” she answered, in a tone so low that he could barely catch the sound, though in it he still recognized her acceptance of his thought.

He did not know how well the way had been prepared for him by the experience which Sybil's heart had felt within these hours of separation. She had so continually fooled herself, deliberately or otherwise—she was so self-bewildered, that there seemed nothing solid for her to lay hold of now except the refuge that was offered her in being true to truth.

“I agree in what you say,” she answered, in a voice pathetically low and tremulous. “I have not been honest with myself always, but I will try to be. You have shown me that in the sea of doubt, which seems at times to spread on every side of us, truth is the only anchor. I will try to be true, but oh, I did want to keep faith—”

Her voice broke and died away.

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"But, Sybil, you have heard of such a thing as 'faith unfaithful!' You do not wish for such a faith as that!"

"No, no, I do not! I give up! I wish for that no longer. I wish only for the highest faith, and you have shown me that there is a higher allegiance; but I cannot talk about it now. I am bewildered, frightened, strange to myself. Be kind to me, Philip, and do not talk to me about it now."

"Not now or ever, if you wish me not to, dear lady of my heart," he said, his soul exultant, but his voice calm. "My lips are sealed. But grant me one little favor in return. Come into the drawing-room and let us play together once!"

She did not speak immediately; she was hesitating how to answer, when he said:

"Don't refuse me, Sybil; we may be about to part for a long and uncertain time. You will not regret it, if you grant my wish."

She got up then and passed before him through the low window into the dim-lighted room and took her violin from its

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case. That hint of parting was enough, little as she understood it, in connection with the plans of life which he had made.

Quickly tuning her beloved instrument, she was about to make her selection, when Philip, seated at the piano, struck a few chords with a suggestion so dominant that she was fain to follow where he led.

They began to play together, one instrument seeking and finding its accord with the other, as soul sought soul. It was the love-song of a poet's heart that they played, and they were poets as they played it !

The music ebbed and flowed between them, now rising with a more vital touch upon each heart, and now sinking into fainter longing. Deep and dominant were the resounding chords struck by the man's strong hands, high and aspiring the vibrant notes with which the violin in the woman's hands responded. They were very near to each other. Her white sleeve almost touched him as her bow-arm swayed and her body lightly bent in unison.

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She did not look at him. She dared not. She was thinking of that parting and a time when she might play these strains alone, while her heart sought vainly for the harmony with which her soul, as well as her ears, was flooded now.

The man, however, had no such fears. He was very bold and looked with ardent eyes into her averted face.

He knew the power of that look. He knew that she felt it on her. The room was dim, but he seemed to feel the sight of the deep flush that suffused her face. Not moving his eyes from that beloved face he played on—tones passionately tender—until the long preamble led up to the climax of love's expression. Then suddenly he took his hands from the keys, and the silence of the room was broken only by that poignantly sweet violin-voice, which for a moment faltered on alone, and then died away also, as Sybil's hands fell nerveless, too, and the music passed into an echo.

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The strain had been ruthlessly interrupted, but the melody and the passion of it surged on in his blood and sang aloud in his soul as he rose, and with two stealthy steps was at her side and had laid by her violin and bow and clasped her hands in his.

They were cold and trembling, those small, childlike hands, but their contact was a response of as subtle and certain accord as violin had been to piano.

She did not speak, but for one instant she looked straight into his eyes, and then her own eyes fell.

That look was enough!

"Sybil," he said, "you love me!" And with his face bent close to her—that face which she had long adored through the agonizing protest of her divided heart—she could not frame the words by which she would have denied.

"You love me!" he said again; and now his arm went softly round her waist, and she felt her being girdled with a sweet-

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ness, a comfort, a delight, beyond any dream or reality of loving that had ever come to her before.

"You love me, Sybil!" he repeated, as if the words were a delight which he could not deny himself. "Tell me, my darling."

"I cannot, oh, I cannot!" she began, helplessly, and her breaths came thick, as if from rising sobs.

"Then do not," he said. "You need not speak. I only ask you to listen."

It was enough that she did not draw away from him, that he could feel the weight of her weak, sweet body willingly surrendered to his strength.

"If you will not tell me that you love me, Sybil, then hear how I love you! I cannot remember when I did not have an ideal woman in my soul and my mind and my heart. She was so real and distinct to me that I should have felt it sacrilege to ask any other woman to be my wife, and I never did. I always knew that I should

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recognize her instantly, if I should ever see her, and so I did. When I saw you at the altar about to be married to another man, I knew you for that woman, and I gave you up forever. Your wedding was a ceremony of solemn renunciation for me. But God had made us for each other, and his will and work have triumphed. Long ago I realized my dedication to you. Do you at last realize yours to me?"

"Yes," she said, "I know it is so. It is the highest revelation that has ever been given to my soul. I dare not disregard it."

Her voice was so solemn, her face in the dim light so austere in its pale beauty, that the fever in the man's blood cried out in protest at the restrictions he had laid upon himself.

"Sybil, Sybil," he said, "do you want to disregard it? Are you taking me from a sense of duty, when my heart is bursting for the love of you?"

He drew her close against him and

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bent to read her eyes. There was no concealment of their message.

As that gaze of passionate and unrestricted love flashed into his, the lips of each sought each, and clung together in a kiss of union, wherein body, soul, and mind had each an equal part.

"My God, how wonderful!" he said, as they drew apart from that long kiss. "And it is this that God has given men and women! Oh that they would only live up to their high privilege!"

"Philip, Philip, Philip!" was all that she said, but it was as if the voice of love spoke through her, and called him by the name with which he was crowned king through the consecration of that kiss.

"Come out with me under the stars," he said, "where an hour ago I was alone in my passionate longing for you, doubting God's goodness and favor toward me! I did wrong to doubt. It was for this that he created me, and you, too, my Sybil,

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though we have come to it through strange and winding ways ! ”

When they were there alone together in the silent night time, flecked by the silver lights that penetrated the shadows, screened by the fragrant trees, their footsteps stilled by the tender grass, he stopped, and took her once more into his arms. But that moment's pure delight was suddenly pierced by a pang of pain.

“ You said you might be going away ! ” she whispered, her voice trembling.

A low laugh answered her.

“ Not now ! ” he said. “ If you had denied me I should have gone, for a time at least, though I should never have given you up. Now we shall never part again, for this world or the next. Surely, if love and faith mean anything they mean that such a love as ours is for eternity as well as time, for those whom God has joined together he will not put asunder ! ”

And Sybil, as she gave herself to the sweet joy of his embrace, looked deep

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into her soul with a new light by which all things were justified—the past, forever sacred as it was; the present, brighter with bliss than any dream had ever pictured; and the future, which, coming out of these, and being the result of God's great plan in making men and women for each other, must be a heaven above, only one step removed from the heaven on earth into which they were entered now!

THE END.



